

Select

Architecture

**Dublin
face lifts**
giving buildings
a new skin

**Poetic
design**
Malcolm Fraser
and the art of
arts venues

**Timber
buildings
in Ireland**
bending the
boundaries

**When in
Rome**
Renzo Piano
and Richard Meier

€4.25
£3.15



Robert Venturi identified the façade (and by definition architecture) as being the result of internal and external pressures; economic, cultural or historical. While this condition of separation between the body and the skin was at first an effective means of production it was not envisaged that it would lead to our current architectural dilemma.

The recent alterations to Roches Stores in Henry Street, by Newenham Mulligan and Associates, underline this current dilemma, the relationship (or lack of) between façade and content. In commerce it seems that it is necessary to renew one's image to keep fashionable. This particular attitude has emerged from an ability to change one's own image, first through clothes, and cosmetics, and now through surgery.

The democratisation of cosmetic surgery is the apogee of a process originating in the 1950s. Born out of the necessary treatment of horrific war injuries, technology and opportunity came together to provide the foundation for what has become predominantly an elective, aesthetic procedure rather than a medical necessity. In parallel the architecture of façade, of form over content, emerged organically within the American post war era to be acknowledged in Venturi and Rauch Brown's Learning from Las Vegas.

The ability to change one's appearance without any underlying reconstruction is seductive and celebrated as a liberating process. Freeing one of any need to represent or reflect historical, cultural or familial experience one could portray whatever one chooses or even adopt another image. This work does not seem to attempt any resolution of the relationship between the inside and outside.

This new mimetic tradition is based on image rather than the traditional view of attempting to mirror reality (nature).

While most fashion shops rely heavily on transparency to entice people, only Zara is permitted this opportunity while the remainder of the multiples use the blind façade as an opportunity for internal wall display. Given the two streets it faces, the lack of windows is surprising. Windows are provided at the top floor where partial views of the city's roofscape are possible but not completely exploited. The façade moves to divorce the contents from its external realm, reflecting a suburban tendency.

The corners or meeting points of the built canvasses are left glazed to allow for customer access, which also allow minor glimpses up and down the street at the upper levels.

The protruding café is reminiscent of the protruding galleries in the Benson and Forsyth National Gallery. Since these skins respond to neither context nor internal use they are akin to a mask rather than a skin. When Venturi and Rauch Brown wrote Learning from Las Vegas they sought a way in which cultural

meaning could be carried within the confines of the façade. In the American commercial context this was, or is, the limit of what most architects were allowed to concern themselves with.

While Post Modernism attempted to critique the inherent limitations at the heart of Modernism, it missed the fact that much of its practical foundation originated in the Victorian experiments, which Corbusier rationalised in the Domino House and the Five Points of Architecture.

Behind the gymnastic elevations of Roches Stores is a series of 'flat-packed' standardised floors with common ceilings, floors and lighting features, stepping back several building blocks echo the flat floor of the Domino House allowing the 'free façade' a number of significant opportunities.

The logic of the free façade has now given way to the aesthetic of the surface, sometimes a 3-dimensional façade. Architectonics, based on the logic of traditional construction, has been replaced by façade and structure; skin and bones. This is a new

Opposite top, and below: the Chocolate Soup cafe clinging to the edge of Roches Stores in Henry Street, by Newenham Mulligan Architects

Opposite below: an NMA designed office in Dublin

